

Saskatoon

'It's been so long': Select Sask. care homes reopen to visitors after 5-month lockdown

An assisted living facility in Saskatoon is still waiting for its second doses of COVID-19 vaccine

[Guy Quenneville](#) · CBC News · Posted: Apr 29, 2021 6:13 AM CT | Last Updated: April 30



Married couple Lawrence and Shirley Fay, aged 99 and 94, respectively, live at an assisted living facility in Saskatoon where visitors are restricted and residents have not yet received their second doses of COVID-19 vaccine. (Debi Walper)

[comments](#)

Shirley Fay still may not be able to receive visitors but she can wheel herself outside when she needs a breather.

"I try and go in an alley or somewhere where there's nobody so I take off my mask and I can have a breath of fresh air," she says.

Fay, 94, is in a wheelchair and lives with her 99-year-old husband Lawrence at Preston Park 2, an assisted living facility in Saskatoon where residents have received their first, but not their second, doses of COVID-19 vaccine.

Preston Park is known for putting on a range of events for its residents — everything from [wedding vow renewal ceremonies](#) to [1940s-themed proms](#).

But in-person group activities and meals were suspended at the home after a resident tested positive for COVID-19 two weeks ago.

Faye said it's just the latest layer of isolation.

Visits at Preston Park 2 have been severely restricted for months — a move that aligns with the lockdown of long-term and personal care homes in the province since Nov. 19.

"My husband is failing," Fay said. "It's just getting mentally really hard, not being able to have somebody come."

"It's just been going on for so long," she said of the pandemic.

Isolation devastating for residents, visitor says

Beginning Thursday, long-term and personal care homes in Saskatchewan where 90 per cent of residents received their second dose of COVID-19 vaccine at least three weeks ago will be allowed to admit visitors.

That plan has undergone some abrupt changes. Regina and three other communities where the risk of contracting coronavirus variants of concern remains high were [struck from that plan](#)

[on Wednesday.](#)

- [Visits at Regina care homes to remain restricted as rules ease elsewhere on Thursday](#)

Care homes were specifically mentioned in Saskatchewan's vaccine priority plans; assisted living facilities like Preston Park were not, though the plan's first phase was focused in part on "people of advanced age."

Residents of Preston Park received their first doses on March 1. Soon after, [the province announced](#) it would space out first and second vaccine doses by four months, though 24 per cent of Saskatchewan seniors aged 80 or over have already received their second dose.

"I don't know why it's taking such a long time to get our second vaccination," Fay said.

CBC News reached out to the Ministry of Health for comment on when Preston Park residents can optimistically expect to receive their second doses.

Sandra Svoboda, whose mother Angie lives at Preston Park Retirement Residence, a separate building close to Preston Park 2, is inside the home regularly because she's been designated a support person. Angie has dementia and can't dress herself or perform other basic functions, she said.

Sandra Svoboda, whose mother Angie lives at Preston Park Retirement Residence in Saskatoon, has the isolation of recent months has taken its toll on residents. (CBC)

Svoboda said it's been "overwhelming" to watch other residents of the seniors centre deteriorate during the months of isolation.

"It was a very, very vibrant community and I have seen a number of residents that I got very close to literally waste away. And I'm not just talking about physically. I'm talking about emotionally. I'm talking about psychologically," Svoboda said.

"It was palpable. And you could hear them talking about it."

She said there has been much lobbying to get second doses inside the seniors centre.

Asked on Wednesday about the further emotional toll the continued clampdown will have on homes in Regina and the other restricted areas, Health Minister Paul Merriman said the decision to open up homes with high resident vaccination rates was a response to those concerns.

- **[Sask. to reopen care homes to visitors, under certain conditions, starting April 29](#)**

The Saskatchewan Health Authorities has meanwhile released details on [how exactly the reopening of homes will work](#).

Residents will be able to receive two family members at a time indoors, with no limit on that pool of visitors.

Up to four visitors per resident will be allowed to visit outdoors.

Fully vaccinated residents may leave on a day pass and not have to quarantine upon return.

Unvaccinated residents will be permitted visitors, but only if those visitors are fully vaccinated.

(Saskatchewan Health Authority)

In an FAQ, the health authority addressed why it's requiring visitors to unvaccinated residents to get shots while not also requiring care home staff to get vaccinated.

"There are ongoing strategies to try to increase vaccinations among health care workers," according to the FAQ.

- [**Unvaccinated care-home workers a bigger threat than family visits, Sask. health official says**](#)

Appeals are possible for residents who cannot be vaccinated for medical or religious reasons.

On Thursday, the Ministry of Health sent out a further clarification.

Many care homes may not be able to meet the 90 per-cent vaccination threshold due to their small populations even if just one resident cannot be immunized. Therefore, some flexibility will be allowed, according to the ministry.

There are almost 160 long-term care homes and about 250 personal care homes in Saskatchewan.

The list of homes that are eligible to receive visitors can be viewed [on this page](#). Scroll to the bottom and select "List view."

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